

ought to operate. It is no way to run a railroad or a government.

NATIONAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT ACT

Earlier this week, as I was saying earlier, the Senate passed other legislation called the lands bill, but it is really about land conservation. It is about ensuring that we have the ability to protect treasures around our great country.

There were two provisions that were in this land bill that were very important for Ohio. One had to do with something called the Ohio & Erie Canalway National Heritage Area. You have probably heard of the Erie Canal. It ran through Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, and other States. The national heritage area is a 110-mile route on that canal from Cleveland to New Philadelphia, OH. It follows the route of the canals that went along the Cuyahoga River. It is a beautiful, beautiful area. It is the 87-mile trail, which is now enjoyed by 2.5 million visitors a year, that we wanted to be sure to protect in this legislation.

I have been there, and my family has been there. It is a great place to hike and great place to bicycle. It is a great place to go bird watching. It is a great place just to enjoy time with your family.

It is our history that we are preserving. The canalway was established as a national heritage area by Congress in 1996, and although Congress has authorized funding for the Ohio & Erie Canalway National Heritage Area through fiscal year 2021, we had reached a funding cap this year, which meant we were at risk of losing about 100,000 bucks. That may not sound like much in the context of the Federal budget, but \$100,000 is a big deal to the canalway. Why? Because we use the Federal money to leverage private money and State and local money, and it is a critical part of making sure that we continue to have this beautiful treasure in our State that brings 2.5 million visitors a year. It adds a lot of economic benefits to our area. So Senator BROWN from Ohio and I have promoted this. We know that this limited Federal funding is going to be critical to leveraging those public-private partnerships, helping to create 4,200 jobs in the region and generating \$408 million in economic benefits.

It is important to have that kind of stable funding in our heritage areas so they can continue to do what they do—to tell our Nation's rich history and to provide the recreational opportunities to the people I represent. So I am glad that was included in the land package.

There was also another piece of legislation that was passed. It was a bill that Senator CARDIN from Maryland and I had been promoting called the Migratory Birds of the Americas Act, and it reauthorizes the Fish and Wildlife's program that promotes long-term conservation, research, and habitat protection for more than 380 different species of migratory birds.

This is a big deal to our State of Ohio. We are a big bird-watching State.

We have a lot of migratory species, including our State bird, the cardinal.

George Voinovich, whose seat I hold, was a big champion for this program in his time in the Senate, and he used to talk about the importance of this from an economic point of view. It is true that bird watching brings more than 75,000 visitors a year to just one single birding event in Ohio. For the birders who are listening, you probably know it. It is in northwest Ohio at the Maumee Bay State Park. It is called the "Biggest Week in American Birding," and polls have ranked it as the top birding event in the country. We like to think it is.

There is a study out of Bowling Green that indicates that bird watching around Lake Erie has contributed more than \$26 million annually to our local economy—\$26 million a year—and it has created almost 300 jobs.

So passage of this legislation is great news for us. It is about protecting that habitat in Ohio but also the habitat where these birds go in the wintertime. They are snow birds. They go south. We ensure they are going to come back and ensure we can continue to have that economic benefit and enjoy that natural beauty.

So I commend Senators MURKOWSKI, CANTWELL, and MANCHIN for working to get this legislation through the Senate. I look forward to the House's taking it up. It also has a good provision in there for helping our sportsmen and ensuring that we have public access to public lands. So my hope is that can move forward and we can ensure that we begin to deal with the issues that were addressed in that lands package.

One thing that was not addressed in the lands package that I want to be sure we don't lose sight of is the condition of our national parks.

Now, again, if you are going to talk about the treasures of our country, you have to put the national parks right at the top. We have this amazing park system that is the envy of some of the other countries around the world and the reason so many foreign visitors come to our country. The national parks now attract 330 million visitors annually. By the way, that is more visitors in the last few years than in the previous few years. So it is actually going up some.

These 330 million visitors come to see 84 million acres of parks and historical sites. Again, it is a huge economic boon to our country because a lot of people are coming from outside the country but also from the local areas, where people travel to get a beautiful vacation with their family, one they can afford. So we need to do everything we can do to hold our parks up.

Here is the problem. We have, over time, funded the parks' day-to-day operations but not funded their longer term maintenance problems. So think of a building that has a roof that is leaking. Now we are funding the program within that building and the naturalists, but what we are not funding is

the actual reconstruction of that building. It is called a maintenance backlog. That backlog has grown and grown and grown over the years to the point that we now have a \$12 billion maintenance backlog in our parks, and the park funding that we provide every year can't come close to providing that funding. So what some of us have done over the years is tried to bring attention to this and to figure out a way to get funding that was specifically focused on how to ensure that our national parks don't continue to deteriorate.

Again, they are such a beautiful part of our country, our history, and our culture. We have to preserve that legacy.

In Ohio, we have eight national parks, including Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Cuyahoga Valley National Park is one of the top 14 visited parks in the country. We are very proud of that. Whether it is biking, hiking, fishing, or kayaking, 2.7 million visitors a year go to Cuyahoga Valley. I am one of them. I like to do all of that there.

So these parks need to be sure that they can continue to be this treasure for the future. The infrastructure—the water infrastructure, the roads, the buildings, the bridges—is all deteriorating to the point where actually some of it can't be used.

If you go to a national park today, you may see that there is a trail closed or there is a visitors center that can't be visited. You may see that some of the campgrounds are closed or some of the bathrooms are closed because those facilities have not been able to keep up with their deferred maintenance.

So I think we should be putting more money into deferred maintenance and bringing our parks up to speed and addressing this \$12 billion backlog than the idea of expanding parks. We ought to be focused more on the stewardship of the parks we have, and that \$12 billion is impossible to find within the parks' budget that we have.

Think about your own house. If you allow deferred maintenance to build up and you don't take care of the roof, as an example, what happens? Well, you get a leak in the roof and then pretty soon your drywall is ruined, and I am pretty sure you would find out that your floor is ruined, and the costs mount up. That is what is happening in our parks. So we are not fixing the deferred maintenance, and we are creating other costs and other problems, and I have seen it. I have gone to four of our larger parks in Ohio to see, specifically, what their priorities are in terms of deferred maintenance.

One is a leaky roof. Another is a bridge. Another is part of a railroad track that runs through it, a tourism railroad track. Another is a seawall on Lake Erie. If that is not fixed, it then causes other damage.

My hope is that we can, on a bipartisan basis, deal with this because these problems compound. They get worse and worse if you don't deal with

them. We can't wait any longer to address these maintenance needs.

Even though we don't have Yellowstone Grand Teton, or Yosemite in Ohio—we don't have huge parks like those—we have a \$100 million backlog in deferred maintenance in our smaller parks in Ohio—\$100 million.

I toured Cuyahoga Valley National Park with Superintendent Craig Kenkel and Deb Yandala, who is CEO of the Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Deb is also president of the national association of friends groups for our parks. These friends groups are fantastic. They provide a lot of funding for the parks, private sector funding. I think that is an incredibly important part of our overall park funding, but they can't afford these maintenance projects either.

Today, there is more than \$45 million at Cuyahoga Valley alone in unmet maintenance needs—\$875,000 for badly needed renovations for their welcome center. I have been there. I have seen it. They need it. More than \$3 million is needed to renovate parking lots that are crumbling, and more than \$2 million is needed for trail repair for the extensive trail system throughout the park.

I have also been to other parks in Ohio and have seen what some of the deferred maintenance is. At the Perry's Victory & International Peace Memorial up on Lake Erie, \$47.7 million is needed in long-delayed maintenance, which includes millions to repair the cracks in the seawall there to enable the rest of the monument to continue to exist, and the visitor's center has to be made ADA compatible and needs repairs.

Everything we talk about here in terms of the parks is normally very positive. Democrats and Republicans alike love the parks. People in America love our parks. But I think they are surprised to learn that just underneath the surface, our parks are crumbling. We have to do more to ensure they are going to be enjoyed for generations to come.

From 2006 until 2017, annual visitation increased by 58 million people. As these needs are growing, more people are coming, putting more and more pressure on the parks. Keeping up with this aging infrastructure and increased visitation has really stretched the Park Service and required them to focus on just the very immediate maintenance needs and postpone or delay these other projects. We can't continue to use these bandaids. We have to address the underlying issue.

I feel this is a debt unpaid. This is deferred maintenance that has built up over the last couple of decades that we should have addressed and we didn't, and now we need to go back and do it to ensure that it doesn't cause additional costs. So this week, I have reintroduced legislation I have worked on in the last three Congresses. I have reintroduced it with three of my colleagues—Senator MARK WARNER from

Virginia, Senator LAMAR ALEXANDER from Tennessee, and Senator ANGUS KING from Maine. Two Republicans, one Democrat, and one Independent—that makes it tri-partisan. It is called the Restore Our Parks Act—a common-sense solution to deal with this \$12 billion backlog of long-overdue maintenance projects.

I thank my colleagues for stepping up and working on this together, and we have. We have had different proposals out there. Senator WARNER came up with the idea of using offshore and onshore revenue from oil and gas drilling. We combined with the bill that Senator ALEXANDER and Senator KING had put forward. There are others who have great ideas. Senator STEVE DAINES from Montana is one of our strong supporters. He is chair of the National Parks Subcommittee of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. As he said, he grew up in the shadow of Yellowstone Park. We have lots of colleagues on both sides of the aisle who care about this and are involved, and I thank them for their hard work.

Senator ALEXANDER told me that in the 100-year history of our national parks, there has never been a single bill more important than this one. That is saying a lot. Since Teddy Roosevelt decided to acquire this land for our national parks, there have been lots of ways we have tried to help the parks, including, recently, legislation that I drafted on the centennial of the parks that helps us get more public and private money into the parks. That is good, but it is not enough to handle these incredible—\$12 billion—deferred maintenance costs we have now.

The legislation creates what is called a legacy restoration fund, which will get half of all the annual energy revenues over the next 5 years that are not otherwise allocated, and it will be used for priority deferred maintenance projects. These are royalties from onshore and offshore energy development. The Trump administration is doing more of that development, so there is more revenue coming in. The bill caps the deposits into the fund at \$1.3 billion annually, so no matter what, even if there is a lot more money coming in, we will have a cap of \$1.23 billion annually, which will provide a total of \$6.5 billion for deferred maintenance projects over the next 5 years.

I said \$12 billion earlier, and that is the amount, but for the urgent priorities, it is about \$6.5 billion. That is how we came up with that number. So what we are trying to do is—at least let's address the urgent priorities in the next 5 years using the revenues coming into our government from these offshore and onshore energy projects, oil and gas projects. Again, if it is allocated for something else, like the Land and Water Conservation Fund, we don't touch it. It is just funding that is not already allocated somewhere else.

Last year, we had 37 cosponsors here in the Senate for this legislation, Re-

publicans and Democrats alike—more than one-third of this Chamber.

A similar House bill, our House companion bill, had 234 Members cosponsoring it—more than the 218 needed, more than the majority.

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee reported this bill out on a bipartisan basis last fall. I was on the committee. We had a good debate on it. We reported it out with a 19-to-4 vote. There is not a lot we do around here that is that bipartisan.

We received overwhelming support from conservation and outdoor recreation groups. This includes the National Parks Conservation Association, the Outdoor Industry Alliance, the Trust for Public Land, the Pew Charitable Trusts, and others. At our hearing we had on the legislation last year, the director of the Pew Charitable Trusts said it well: "Supporting this bipartisan bill is a wise investment for our National Parks System and has overwhelming support from the American public, generates hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars for the economy each year and provides access to world class recreation opportunities and helps preserve our nation's history."

Yes, the parks do all of that. That is why it is so important that we preserve them and ensure that this long-term problem gets addressed now.

I am proud to introduce legislation in the Senate this week, and I am proud that the House companion bill is being introduced today by Representatives BISHOP and KILMER. I look forward to working with my colleagues to get this bill across the finish line. I thank the Senators who have already signed up as cosponsors. I hope we can continue to build support for this and get this commonsense bill done to help preserve our national treasures.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

JOINT REFERRAL OF NOMINATION

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that PN175, the nomination of John Lowry III, of Illinois, to be Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans' Employment and Training, sent to the Senate by the President, be referred jointly to the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions and the Veterans' Affairs Committees.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.